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ABSTRACT

The success of high schools depends on the principals. High school principals should concentrate on their schools, use their assistants efficiently, and inspire school pride. According to previous research, the major elements of effective schools include high expectations for practitioners and students, parent involvement, administrative visibility, a disciplined student body, a secure school environment, and proportionate teacher-to-student ratios. The most commonly recognized managerial responsibilities include planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. When planning, principals should examine the management pool, assess the available resources, and select a time frame that will promote the progress of the plan. Principals should manage time through restrictions on the length of meetings, through a numbered agenda, and through delegation; principals should motivate and communicate with people efficiently; and principals should demonstrate respect, honesty, and consideration toward their staff and students. The elements of efficient leadership include the ability to identify tasks and the ability to inspire other people to accomplish goals. The required characteristics of high school principals are intelligence, communication abilities, trust in subordinates, a willingness to take risks, and the courage to be candid. Included are 15 references. (RG)

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THE EFFECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Lessons From An Experienced Practitioner

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James M. DeCicco

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PREFACE

There are a few observations that may help you through the pages ahead. The data collected for this document on THE EFFECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL are the result of extensive readings on management styles in business, education, politics, the military, and interviews with scores of high school teachers and principals across this country and in Europe.

The prescriptions offered in this document may be applicable to other organizations; however, they are primarily directed to you who want to improve your skills as high school principals.

Mortimer Adler, who presented a dramatic plan for renovating both the elementary and the high schools across the United States, was asked by a reporter "Is it possible to find a good school with a lousy principal?"(12) He had no trouble answering the question. "No, every good school had a good principal."(12) At a Harvard symposium Dr. Adler stated: The superintendent of schools is not the key to a good school. It is and always will be the principal. The principal must not be burdened with administrative details from the superintendent. A principal who is busy with central office administrative work will have a poorly-managed school. When General Robert Johnson, former Johnson and Johnson chairman, was asked why J & J was so successful, he said, "Stick to the knitting."(13) Principals must "stick to the knitting" by devoting all their energies, talents, and dedication to their schools, making their school the very best. If every principal "sticks to the knitting," the district will become outstanding.

Research reveals that high school principals in the most

effective schools do not experience confusion about the dual nature of their jobs--to be instructional leaders as well as effective managers since they must deal with a myriad of non-educational issues on a daily basis. Since the complexity of most high school requires the staff to be decentralized as contrasted to elementary schools which have smaller staffs and a greater sense of shared purpose, high school principals should utilize their assistants and department chairpersons more effectively. The principal establishes priorities and always sets the tone and shapes the process for effective instruction. In addition, the principal must be a charismatic leader who will instill a high degree of pride and enthusiasm among the entire staff and the student body. However, an excellent instructional leader who is also an effective manager must create the one absolute quality necessary to any effective organization--high morale. Where high morale exists, everyone will extend her/himself beyond the norm, resulting in greater productivity and effectiveness. People who feel good about themselves produce good results.

The excellent instructional leader who is also an effective manager must never forget whom he serves. Lew Young, Editor of Business Week, says it this way:

"Probably the most important management fundamental that is being ignored today is staying close to the customer to satisfy his needs and anticipate his wants. In too many companies, the customer has become a bloody nuisance whose unpredictable behavior damages carefully made strategic plans, whose activities mess up computer operations, and who stubbornly insists that purchased products should work."(13)

In another format, a few years ago, I said it another way:

Dear Staff:

Because we so easily get caught up in the less important or because we so easily busy ourselves with symbols, and scores, and keeping our heads above the flood of paperwork, we sometimes forget who we are and why we are here. So, I would remind you as I remind myself:

> The most important people who enter this school's doors each day are not the principal nor even the teachers.
>
> The most important people who enter this school each morning are the students.
>
> Students are not an interruption of our work: they are the purpose of it.
>
> Students are not cold statistics: They are sensitive young adults with feelings and emotions just like our own.
>
> Students are young people who bring us their needs, and it is our responsibility to meet those needs professionally, courteously, and expeditiously.
>
> Teach and cherish them. That is why we are here.
>
> James M. DeCicco
> Principal

By now you have an idea of where I am going to take you with my document on THE EFFECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL. I hope the following pages help you become a more effective leader.

EFFECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

This position paper, based on research and personal experience, represents an attempt to delineate the inherent qualities in effective high school management. "Effective," according to Webster, "means producing the intended or expected result." With this definition as a guide, let us begin to examine the research and the various management functions.

Research For Better Schools, the Philadelphia-based educational consulting firm, stated the following:

"Strong, focused, supportive administrative leadership is a precondition for any degree of effectiveness in a school. That is, it almost goes without saying that a strong principal makes a critical difference. Most of the suggested approaches to school improvement can only be instituted with the guidance and support of a strong, committed and dedicated administrative leadership."(5)

Various other studies found that effective schools have the following key elements:

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS & STAFF

POSITIVE PARENTAL PARTICIPATION AND HIGH PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

HIGH VISABILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL AND HIS ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

AN ORDERLY, DISCIPLINED STUDENT BODY IN A SAFE, ATTRACTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

TEACHER/STUDENT RATIOS THAT ARE NOT OVERPOWERING

THE MANAGER AND THE FUNCTIONS

Just what is a manager? A manager is a person who gets things done through other people. "You don't manage people, you manage things. You lead people." Grace Hopper, Admiral USN

While the term manager has connotations associated with profit-making organizations, it is clear that managers exist in all kinds of organizations. It does not matter whether an individual is called hospital administrator, police chief, principal, or corporate president--the individual is filling the position of a manager. In the broadest sense, the manager is responsible for carrying out those activities needed for reaching the organizational goals. More specifically, the manager performs certain basic functions to get things done. These functions which will be familiar to most of you are: (1) planning, (2) organizing, (3) staffing, (4) directing, and (5) controlling.

Planning involves decisions about how the organization is to accomplish its goals. This includes deciding what is to be done, how it is to be done, and when and by whom it is to be done.

Organizing involves the preparations necessary for implementing plans. As principals we must decide the jobs to be performed and then determine who reports to whom in the organization. Employees must be assigned tasks which are clearly identified, defined, and coordinated.

Staffing involves filling the jobs of the school with the right people, a task much easier said than done. Excellent vice principals and department supervisors are most important and necessary to effective school management. Without competent vice

principals and department supervisors we cannot effectively manage our schools.

Directing involves the motivation and leadership we give to our total staffs so that the overall goals of our schools can be achieved.

Controlling involves monitoring all school activities. Our jobs are to make the changes needed to match performance with established standards.

Why has decision-making not been included as one of our functions as principals? Decision-making is the most important part of all managerial functions and, in fact, permeates every facet of every task we perform. When we plan, we must decide about alternatives. When we organize, we must decide what type of organizational structure best suits the needs of our schools. When we provide staff for an organizational structure, we must decide what leadership style will best motivate the staff.

When we control, we must decide the significance of the outcomes in respect to the goals that motivated us to exercise control.

Decision-making applies to planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. Planning is obviously not foolproof; if it were, Ford would never have developed the Edsel. Good plans go awry, but most studies on management point out, it is better to overplan than to operate from the seat of your pants or to use the knee jerk administrative technique. As principals, we must accept the idea that with sound planning we can begin to control our own destinies instead of being controlled by random events. As principals we must also honestly examine the manage-

ment pool, the resources available, and all other factors that will bear on the success of the plan. Finally, a time frame must be considered. Principals must choose a time frame that will allow for orderly progress of the plan. Strategies are then developed and specified to allow for monitoring.

Meetings are necessary for coordination and teamwork. However, meetings become longer than necessary if the subject of the meeting is not sharply focused. We must keep meeting length within reason by setting a time limit and developing a numbered agenda. Then, we must follow the agenda, which means firmly deferring unlisted items to the next meeting.

We must also delegate as many tasks as possible. A key way that we as principals can better manage our time by assigning planned activities to others and then supervising the progress. Delegating tasks and handling all of the concomitant interpersonal dynamics are specific managerial skills which must be utilized. The decision of what you do yourself and what you delegate is an important time-management decision.

The following are some suggestions that have been developed to help avoid delegation errors.

- Delegate specific tasks to others, especially to individuals who have proven their ability to perform well.
- Provide accurate, lucid instructions and set a time for completion.
- Perform short tasks yourself especially when they take more time to explain than for you to do them.

- Do not accept delegated assignments that are incomplete or poorly researched. Do not allow a subordinate to delegate his assigned task to you.
- Do not let delegated tasks be postponed. Periodically follow up each task you have delegated with reminders--Mike, "How are you doing with the Middle States Report?" Bernice, "I like the first draft, and I am looking forward to the completed product."
- Do not over-supervise. Look for acceptable progress and results. Use a little of the Jeffersonian philosophy--"He that leads best, leads least." Give your subordinates necessary breathing room.

In Harold Geneen's book "Managing," Geneen, the former President of I.T.T., makes a number of cogent points about management that can be applied to our roles as principals. He said:

> "Management Must Manage!
> Management MUST Manage!
> MANAGEMENT MUST MANAGE!
>
> How many times do I have to tell you?"(8)

If we change Geneen's word "management" to the words "high school principals" we hear the quote:

> "High School Principals Must Manage!
> High School Principals MUST Manage
> HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS MUST MANAGE!"

This credo is very simple, probably the closest thing to the essence of effective school management. The strange thing is that in one form or another we, as high school principals, know that we must manage, yet somehow we forget. Manage means to get something done, to accomplish a goal that we and our teams find

worthy of our time and efforts. We must accept the challenges of managing to be successful high school principals.

Remember, management is nothing more than motivating other people. The only way you can motivate people is to communicate with them as often as necessary. The emphasis on human skills is extremely important, and one of the great intrepreneurs of all times, John D. Rockefeller said: "I will pay more for the ability to deal with people than any other ability under the sun." (4) Blanchard and Hersey in their book Management of Organizational Behavior reported a survey done by the American Management Society which stated that the ability to deal effectively with people was more vital than intelligence, decisiveness, knowledge, or job skills. When you examine what John D. Rockefeller said and ponder the results of the American Management Society survey you clearly understand the importance of effective communications and the ability to motivate and "deal" with people effectively.

EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the very heart and soul of the principalship. "Leadership is a broader concept than management. Management is thought of as a special kind of leadership in which the achievement of organizational goals is paramount. The key difference between the two concepts, therefore, lies in the word organization. Leadership occurs any time one attempts to influence behavior of an individual or group, regardless of the reason."(4) We do not manage schools by shuffling or rearranging organizational charts or applying the latest educational research formulas. What we manage in a school or a business is people, not apes, cats, or dogs. We must treat our people with respect. Respect is gained the old fashioned way--"We must earn it." We must also be above-board in our interactions with our people. We must never strip our people of their dignity. When we as principals truly demonstrate respect, practice honesty, and manifest thoughtfulness for our people, loyalty becomes evident. Respect, honesty, and thoughtfulness produce high morale. When high morale is apparent in our school, we have accomplished the most important ingredient for improving the quality of instruction. HIGH MORALE RESULTS IN HIGH PRODUCTIVITY IN EDUCATION AS WELL AS ANY OTHER HUMAN ENDEAVOR.

Leadership is getting people to do what the leader wants them to do because the leader has influenced or inspired them to believe and to complete their assigned task. Leadership requires us to deal directly with people. If we cannot get along with people or are uncomfortable around people, we will never be an

effective leader and should pursue another endeavor.

The two essential ingredients of successful leadership are: (a) the capacity to perceive what should be done, and (b) the ability to influence other people to achieve results.

Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers who have the ability to cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution almost everybody can understand and remember. Winston Churchill warned the British people to expect "blood, toil, tears, and sweat." Franklin D. Roosevelt told all Americans "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Lenin promised the weary war-torn Russians, "Peace, food, and bread." These are straightforward and very potent messages.

Leaders must know how to use power (that, my friends, is what leadership is all about), but they also have to have a way of showing that they do.

Leaders should know how to appear relaxed and confident. Their walk and demeanor should be firm and purposeful. Leaders ride the waves, move with the tides, understand the yearning of their staffs.

If we know what we are looking for, why is it so difficult to find? The answer lies in a very simple truth about leadership. People can be led only where they want to go. The leader follows, though always a step ahead. Principals who are ineffective leaders are those that tend to be pragmatists, who think that once you have explained why something makes sense, everyone will do it, but experience and history show the fallacy of this belief. When push comes to shove and times get tough, people do not want to be told what went wrong, or lectured to, or given a lot of gob-

bledygook or educational jargon. People want to be moved, excited, inspired, uplifted. In short - YOUR STAFF WANTS TO BE LED.

The effective leader must convince the staff that all is not lost even when they are afraid it is. Confucious said that while the advisers of a great leader should be as cold as ice, the leader himself should have fire, and even a spark of divine madness."

Another successful leader said that you must accustom your staff to a high tempo from the outset, and continuously keep them up to it. If you once allow yourself to be satisfied with norms, or anything less than an all-out effort, you give up the race from the starting post, and will sooner or later be taught a bitter lesson.

I was also pleased to read in Lee Iacocca's best-selling autobiography that he gave the same sage advice that my first sergeant gave me when I was a young Marine lieutenant: If you want to give a man credit, do it in writing. If you want to dress a man down or give him holy hell, do it in the privacy of your office or over the phone. This advice has guided me in my handling of subordinates and how to work effectively with people in many different endeavors.

Treat your staff as adults; treat them as partners. Treat them with dignity; treat them with respect. As Blanchard suggests, "Catch them doing something right."(3) I promise you it will pay great dividends. Thomas J. Watson, President of IBM, puts it well: "IBM's philosophy is largely contained in three simple beliefs. "The most important one," he said, "is our respect

for the individual. We devote more effort to this concept than anything else." In their book, In Search of Excellence, Peters and Waterman found that the most pervasive theme in the best-run companies of America was RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL. That basic belief, the writers said, was omnipresent. The most successful companies they found gave people control over their destinies. They make meaning for people. They turn the average Joe and the average Jane into winners. They let people stand out; they even insist, that people stand out. They always accentuate the positive.

The writers go on to say they are not talking about "mollycoddling." They are talking about tough-minded respect for individuals and the willingness to train them, to set reasonable and clear expectations for them, and to grant them practical autonomy to step out and contribute directly to their jobs. In essence, they suggest that you give your staff every opportunity to succeed and shine. Everyone needs a day in the sun.

The effective high school principal will need the eye of an eagle, the heart of a lion, and the strength of an elephant. The following attributes are also necessary.

- Intelligence: Not necessarily brilliance but the capacity for understanding and for other forms of adaptive behavior--an aptitude in grasping truths, facts, and meaning. The trouble with most of us is that we think with our hopes or fears or wishes rather than with our minds.
- Communications: The ability to impart or interchange thoughts, opinions, or information well in both

speech and writing. The priceless heritage of the free and independent interchange of thought can only be kept with continued vigilance. It also pays to smile and laugh. Research indicates that those who laugh actually live longer than those who do not.

Command Presence: The ability to make decisions with conviction and to take full responsibility for one's own actions, to have confidence in yourself and your ability to lead, to set a positive example for your co-workers. The first great gift we can bestow on others is a good example. You can employ people to work for you, but you must win their hearts to have them work with you.

- Trust: The ability to demonstrate confidence and reliance on the integrity of your subordinates to fulfill their responsibilities in a professional and timely manner. Our lives would be wretched and confined if we missed the candid intimacy developed by mutual trust and esteem.
- Risk: The ability to say, "I'll try." I'm not worrying about the odds. Let's do it for our people. It is impossible to win the great prizes of life without taking some risks. Risk brings out the ingenuity and resourcefulness which may insure success. How dull life must be without any risk. Who bravely dares must sometimes risk a fall.
- Guts: The willingness to tell your superiors and influential people that you think they may be wrong.

Guts may be an intangible attribute in success, but if you don't have guts everyone knows--you can't hide. We must have the will to tell people what we truly think--even at the risk of our careers. We must be prepared to invoke policies and procedures to which we can't fully subscribe. However, if policies and procedures are such that they totally violate our educational philosophy and convictions, then we should consider removing our dedication, our commitment and our talents to another arena. One of man's finest qualities is described by the simple word "Guts"--the ability to take it. Colonel John Roosma puts it this way: "If you have the discipline to stand fast when your body wants to run, if you can control your temper and remain cheerful in the face of monotony or disappointment, you have guts in the soldiering sense. This ability to take it must be trained. The training is hard, mental as well as well as physical. But once ingrained, you can face and fail the enemy as a soldier, and enjoy the challenges of life as a civilian." This, simply translated, means--NO GUTS, NO GLORY!

Words are words, explanations are explanations, promises are promises--but only performance is our reality. Performance alone is the best measure of our confidence, competence, and courage. Only performance gives us the freedom to grow as ourselves. Our performance gives us our reputation. No governmental agent or agency can ever take that away from us. Our

record of achievements and accomplishments are recorded for posterity.

Never forget that: performance is our reality. Forget everything else.

The effective manager and leader is one who turns in the performance. No alibis to others or to one's self will change that. When you have performed well expecially over a sustained period, your community, staff, and your students will remember when everything else is forgotten. Most importantly, you will know that you have performed well. Good luck and good performance to you always.

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